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THE ULRICH HOUSE

A Brief Analysis of a Creative Project

by

Frances Gery

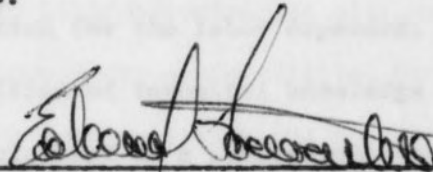
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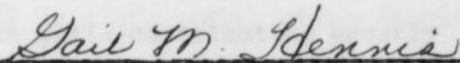
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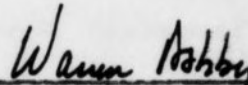
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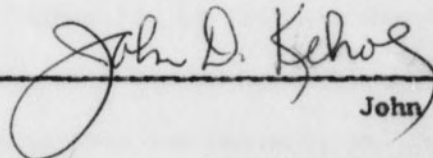
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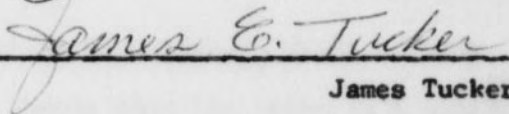
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PART I: PREFACE

Since courses of college instruction usually involve hypothetical problems in the field of study, the Woman's College student of interior design seldom has the opportunity to see her drawings put to use. For this reason the knowledge that one's design will actually be executed, that the product will stand as a monument to the designer's creative ability or to her incompetence, brings a great amount of excitement and serves as incentive to exact superior effort.

Assuming this experiment to be characteristic, there is, in addition, certain compensation for the labor expended. The greatest gains are the acquisition of technical knowledge not previously possessed, the development of a professional attitude, and the personal fulfillment that comes through the exercise of creative talents toward a concrete goal--contributing greatly toward one's growth as an artist.

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PART II: AN APPROACH TO DESIGN

In the field of architecture there are various existing philosophies of design, representing many diverging points of view. Despite certain basic differences, however, the individual approaches overlap in some areas, and for purposes of classification, can be divided into three essentially dissimilar categories.

The first supports the theory of organic architecture, maintaining that a structure, although man-made, is nevertheless a part of nature and should be treated as such. The completed edifice, theoretically, will be in complete harmony with its geographic surroundings, and while it will be unobtrusive, it will have presence, its greatness coming through its close relation to nature.

The structuralists, on the contrary, view the building as a separate entity, man-made, attached to the site but not an integral part of nature. This is borne out by their works, whose simplicity occasionally borders on starkness and whose smooth facades are often emphasized by the use of wide expanses of steel and glass composed in carefully disciplined patterns. Such a structure gains distinction through its honest admission of its true character.

A third group, which, along with the structuralists, recognizes the inherent differences between the man-made and that which is natural, approaches the problem of design in still another manner. While supporting the theory that the house is a unity

within itself, independent from nature, they treat the structure as a sculptural mass, more flexible than the rigidly rectangular constructions of the second group. Through this plasticity, greater freedom of form can be achieved.

None of these theories is entirely self-sufficient, nor is any single theory applicable in every situation. Rather, the designer must exercise his powers of selective reasoning to determine the precise combination which will produce the desired interplay of forms and spatial relationships.

PART III: CONSIDERATIONS

oriented to focus on the best view, which lies downgrade and

In the latitude that it permitted, the Ulrich house presented a challenge in creativity--it was to be a custom-designed residence its natural surroundings, the house is as open as possible, yet built according to the needs and desires of one individual, rather than being a series of compromises tailored to the requirements of a group.

poets, and the use of earth-colored brick and stone does much

In order that the finished residence--site, house and furnishings--might possess coherence, it was necessary to work on the structure itself (with respect for its setting) and the interiors

The Ulrich house is highly structural in feeling, since it simultaneously. The foundation for the entire design was the owner's pattern of living, as related by the owner herself and who might view it the very distinct impression of shelter. In its rigid, box-like construction it has great strength, yet, at a number of points were given careful consideration: the relationship of house to site, of interiors to exterior; the relative importance of space versus cost; the merit of including areas which

The large expanses of clear glass, while they are arranged did not at first seem necessary but which might affect the resale value or be desirable in the event that the owner's pattern of living altered; the aesthetic qualities of the design.

lucent properties, these windows will permit designs traced by the foliage around the house to be visible from within.

The solutions to the various problems, considered together, express a philosophy that is a joint concept of both the owner

and the designer: that a house is a shelter, a place to be lived in; it must at once be satisfactory both aesthetically and functionally.

Foremost among these factors to be considered was the property,

a wooded plot of about six acres, located south of Greensboro. Its

contours suggested that the house be located on a level area, oriented to focus on the best view, which lies downgrade and slightly southeast of the plateau. Because of the beauty of its natural surroundings, the house is as open as possible, yet still retains the concept of a house as a shelter--strong and secure. Pulling the house to the site are the exposed vertical posts, and the use of earth-colored brick and stone does much to make the structure compatible with its environment, as do the stained wood panels. and decorative materials. All of this, and. The Ulrich house is highly structural in feeling, since it was the intention of both owner and designer to impart to those who might view it the very distinct impression of shelter. In its rigid, box-like construction it has great strength, yet, at the same time, the natural surroundings of the house have been utilized.

The large expanses of sheer glass, while they are arranged in a carefully ordered pattern, serve to admit natural light as well as the view from two opposite exposures. Lined with translucent draperies, these windows will permit designs traced by the foliage around the house to be visible from within.

Focal point for the entire structure is the spiral staircase enclosed in glass. One of the few sculptural elements within the residence, its fluid motion softens the crisp lines seen in other areas.

Throughout the house, there are few formal divisions of space; considerable flexibility has been achieved in the open living-dining area, kitchen, and storage area. Although the second floor is more definitely partitioned, the feeling of flowing space is nevertheless retained.

Furnishings have been chosen for their functional efficiency, aesthetic quality, and versatility. Maintenance has also been taken into account in the selection of furniture as well as in the choice of structural and decorative materials. All of this, and, in fact, the design of the house as a whole, has been accomplished within the confines of stringent economic limitations.

PART IV: IN RETROSPECT

An analysis of the past two semesters' accomplishments indicates that this course excels all others at the Woman's College as a means of teaching the advanced student interior and architectural design and the relation between the two.

Whereas typical courses are slanted toward one phase or the other, a project such as this enables the student to pursue both at once, and working with an actual client in a realistic situation provides stimulus to fully explore all the possibilities of design. Through this individual investigation, the student is able to grasp more firmly the concept of the house as a working whole; the interdependency of the various parts is clearly demonstrated.

Certain aspects of the program are more stimulating than others, and the independent method of research and study sometimes results in mistakes which would not occur in a conventional curriculum. However, these experiences hold a lesson, and although this process of learning may not be the most expedient, it does free the student from creative restrictions and brings her to a new level of intellectual maturity.

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